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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0387  
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 0030  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1628  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9831  
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 1312  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0432  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 3035  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 0950  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3560  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0556  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0336  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1700  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0555  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0801  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000307

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2021

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: ATTORNEY WARNS EMBASSY OF SPY CHARGES

REF: CARACAS 00255

Classified By: Mark Wells, Acting Polcouns,  
for Reason 1.4(b).

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Summary  
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1. (C) The attorney for five Venezuelan naval officers accused of espionage on behalf of the USG described to Poloff the details of the case being developed against his clients. Bastidas said the Bolivarian Government accessed e-mail accounts of the defendants and altered messages, including ones sent to the U.S. naval attach. The targets of the investigation appear to be officers, and in one case a relative of an officer, who either were suspected of being disloyal to the Revolution or had blown the whistle on irregularities and corruption. Bastidas, information suggests the government is conducting a witch hunt under the cover of an espionage investigation. End summary.

2. (C) Bastidas told poloff January 19 that he was contacted by a group of four Naval officers on January 13. They said they had been summoned by military prosecutor Joel Febres into a seven-hour meeting that day during which they were accused of espionage on behalf of the United States. Specifically, they were accused of passing classified information to the Embassy in exchange for cash about the government's purchase of three military boats from Spain. The government also accused them of helping to formulate a plan modeled on the U.S. invasion of Panama to topple the Chavez government.

3. (C) Bastidas said the group told him that the prosecutor had shown them several large case files filled with e-mails they had allegedly sent to Correa. However, according to the navy officers, the e-mails were altered. The group believes the government hacked their accounts to create the bogus messages and even froze them out of the accounts. Based on

the dates in the e-mail files, Bastidas said it appeared the government had been working on the accusations since at least December 9, 2005. He said the case was being given high-level attention, and that the head military prosecutor was present at one point during the January 13 session.

14. (C) Bastidas told poloff January 19 that the four Venezuelan naval officers accused of espionage were: Jose Luis Santin Puerta, Ernesto Carrasquero Marino, Jose Rodriguez Vasquez, and Francisco Ferrer Molleja. At a follow-up meeting January 31, Bastidas said there were two new accused, retired naval commander Bernardo Jurado Capeche, and Jacinto Nouel, the father-in-law of Jose Ignacio Plaza. Bastidas said the officers had fled Venezuela - four (Jose Luis Santin Puerta, Ernesto Carrasquero Marino, Francisco Ferrer Molleja, and Bernardo Jurado Capeche) to the United States and one (Jose Rodriguez Vasquez) to Costa Rica. Nouel was taken to the military prison Ramo Verde although he is a civilian, Bastidas said.

15. (C) Bastidas believed that politics governed the selection of each of the six targeted for investigation, and gave further background on several of the accused:

--Jurado is a retired naval officer whose uncle was Minister of Defense. As the captain of a naval vessel, he made two to three trips to Cuba with unknown cargo. He retired approximately three years ago after refusing to make more trips without knowledge of the cargo.

--Nouel is the father-in-law of Jose Ignacio Plaza -- a retired military officer currently seeking asylum in the

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United States. Plaza deserted and fled to the United States in 2005. He was later administratively retired. According to press reports, Plaza retired after accusing two rear-admirals of corruption. Nouel is a 60 year old dentist. Bastidas said the government sent an express package containing a CD with aircraft information to Nouel's house. Nouel signed for the package, and a few hours later a military intelligence (DIM) squad raided his house. The military attorney general's office was involved in the search operation, as was the chief naval intelligence officer.

--Santin was linked to the case because he sent information to the press last fall in support of a September 7 report by journalist Marianela Salazar regarding the military's lack of provisions.

--Carrasquero worked in the Venezuelan navy's public relations office. Bastidas said he thought he was linked to the case because he had regular contact with the Embassy as part of his job function. Bastidas said DIM officials had visited the school attended by Carrasquero's children to seek information from teachers of his whereabouts and activities.

--Rodriguez wrote a thesis several years ago for Central University on Plan Colombia. Bastidas said the thesis was not considered sympathetic to the Bolivarian cause and that it earned Rodriguez a spot in the first round of recrinations. Bastidas asked for the Embassy's help in securing a visa renewal for Rodriguez, who fled in January to Costa Rica. Rodriguez has a wife and two children who still reside in Venezuela and do not have U.S. visas.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) Bastidas is, of course, a defense attorney and his information should be evaluated as such. Still, his analysis that the government is using the U.S. naval attach espionage allegations for cover for a broader witch-hunt in the Navy or armed forces makes sense. We expect to receive similar

requests for visa help as the government proceeds against  
these supposed disloyal officers.  
BROWNFIELD